

LEEDS AND ITS MERCHANTS.

Leeds was in existence more than a thousand years before it attained much commercial notoriety. Built on or near the site of an old Roman camp, it was a fortified town in the days of Bede. Its strength made it a special object of attack at the time of the Norman Conquest, and thereafter, for several generations, the Pagnels and their descendants were its feudal lords. Maurice de Gant, or Pagnel, the last of these, in 1208, gave to his burgesses a charter of freedom, worthily robbing himself of much of his authority in order that the welfare of the town might be promoted. Then, however, and for some centuries ensuing, Leeds was small and unimportant; steadily advancing as a market for wool and sheepskins, but inferior to some others of the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire towns to which the Hull and Boston merchants resorted for those staples of trade with the continental cities.

In ancient Leeds there were few elements of property; but as soon as Lancashire and Yorkshire became great fields of manufacturing energy, Leeds was found to be the fittest centre of its eastern half, having Hull for its port, just as Manchester helped on and was helped by the commercial advancement of Liverpool. Manchester and Leeds have grown together, taking the places, as great manufacturing resorts, of the older towns of Bristol and Norwich. About contemporary with Manchester and Leeds, the great benefactor of Manchester was Sir John Saville, who, in 1626, obtained from Charles I. a charter of incorporation for his native town, and was thereupon appointed its first mayor or alderman. In 1631, Sir John Saville, the great benefactor of Manchester, was Sir John Saville, who, in 1626, obtained from Charles I. a charter of incorporation for his native town, and was thereupon appointed its first mayor or alderman.

Most famous among them all was excellent John Harrison, who was born in 1679, and died in 1766. His father, also a John Harrison, was a rich merchant before him, so prosperous and wealthy that the son had little need to earn money, and wisely spent his fortune in doing all the good that lay in his power.

When he was seven years old, it was reported he saw a poor boy in the streets, with a coat, shoes, and straightway taking of his own coat, threw it over the lad's shoulders. When he was seventy, and himself, if not in actual poverty, much poorer than he formerly had been, a carpenter declared that he had been guilty of his misfortune on himself by the reckless ways in which all through life he had shown his charitable disposition. Having bought Rockley Hall, in the Leeds district, he was anxious to inherit his father's fortune, his first step was to set apart its two largest rooms as storerooms for food and clothing to be given to the poor. In 1626 he performed the functions of Mayor of Leeds, as done by Sir John Saville, and twice afterwards he filled the office in his own name. During his second mayoralty, in 1634, St. John's Church, begun three years earlier, and built at his own expense, was completed. He had already set up a new school, much more commodious building for the old Leeds Grammar School, which had been seventy years before; and in 1653 he established and endowed, near to St. John's Church, a hospital for poor widows. About this time, too, he built himself a house in the village—a good old-fashioned house, with a quadrangular courtyard in the midst, says the old historian, who adds that it has one thing very peculiar in it, namely holes in the ceiling, cut in the wall, and ceilings for the free passage of cats, for which animals he seems to have had great affection as another eminent benefactor, Sir Richard Whittington. Other doubtful anecdotes, akin to some other legends, are recorded in the records of him. "When Charles I. then in the hands of the Scots, was brought to Leeds," it is said, "access to his person was not, of course, easily obtained, but Mr. Harrison desired permission to present his Majesty with a pair of excellent axes, which he brought in his hand. In this the guards could see no treachery, and they accordingly admitted him; but the King, on opening the lid, found that instead of the expected beaver, the vessel was filled with broad pieces. These he contrived to hide with great dexterity, and his loyal benefactor was dismissed with more gratitude than thanks. Honest Harrison could not follow the tale of progress that brought about the Commonwealth, and his last years were made unhappy by the failure of the royal cause. The dejection of many of his old friends was a great grief to him. "The time was when you called me patron, and remonstrated me in your prayers, and now you call me a traitor, and pray for my ruin and perdition. The time was when I suffered for you under the royal party, more than you will suffer for me under the parliament; but now, the times are altered, and you are made my enemy, and pray for my ruin and perdition. The time was when I suffered for you under the royal party, more than you will suffer for me under the parliament; but now, the times are altered, and you are made my enemy, and pray for my ruin and perdition."

The greatest boon conferred by Harrison on the commerce of Leeds was his erection, in Kirkgate, of a "stately cross, for convenience of the market." Thither assembled, during many subsequent generations, the wool producers and wool-staplers, the clothiers, and the cloth merchants of Leeds. Among the most famous of them were John and Philip Thoresby, brothers, and both of them Aldermen of the borough soon after its incorporation, the eldest of whom was grandfather of the Thoresbys, the antiquarian; William Milner, who was Mayor of Leeds in 1697, and father of the William Milner on whom Queen Anne conferred a baronetcy, and presented, according to tradition, the Sykes were conspicuous among the merchants of Leeds during more than two centuries. A William Sykes, son of Richard Sykes, of Skipton, near Carlisle, settled in Leeds as a clothier in 1629, and his grandson Richard, wealthy enough to buy the manor of Leeds from the Crown in 1625, was chief alderman of the town for the first eighteen years of its incorporation. Dying in 1648, he left vast estates to each of his four sons, and ten thousand pounds to each of his four daughters, from whom four knights, and baronet families were descended. Another of the family was Daniel Sykes, who was born in 1632 and died in 1691. He was a merchant, and for many years the greatest merchant there. He followed the Baltic trade, and it is recorded of him that at one time, during a grievous famine in Sweden, he freighted several vessels with provisions, and despatched them gratuitously to Sweden among the starving people. In return for that noble act, the Swedish Government granted him a lease of iron mines, whence some of his grandsons drew immense wealth. The house of Joseph Sykes, Son, and Company for more than thirty years almost monopolized the trade in Swedish iron. Joseph, old Daniel Sykes' grandson, was father of another and more famous Daniel Sykes. He was bred a lawyer, and legal business partly occupied him all through life; but the state of his health led him to find in commerce his chief employment, and he became another famous merchant both in Leeds and in Hull, joining the two callings, and adding to them, joining the more finished workmanship of modern times, until Benjamin Gott set the fashion.

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little mill set up on the Spence, by Kendrew and Porthouse, and it was soon famous in various parts of the kingdom, and before going to Kendrew it, for a little while, a famous resort of linen manufacturers. Thither James Arley went, from Manchester, in 1792, to make careful study of the machine, and to introduce important improvements in it, before going to Kendrew to spend nearly seventy years in forwarding the trade in which, perhaps, he was the most prominent man of all. Thither also went John Marshall, from Leeds, to receive suggestions which he was to turn very notably to the advancement both of Leeds and of himself.

Marshall was born at Leeds, on the 27th of July, 1763, three years after Gott. His grandfather, John Marshall, of Yeadon Low Hall, near Leeds, was a man of some substance; but his father, William Marshall, was a shopkeeper in Brigate. John Marshall was soon tired of his prospects as a shopkeeper's assistant. He was eighteen when Kendrew and Porthouse produced their flax-spinning machine. It is not clear whether he was thereby influenced in his choice of a business, or whether his course had already been marked out. At any rate he lost no time in proceeding to Darlington, there mastering the intricacies—such as they were—of the machine, and returning to his own town, to put it into use at Scotland Mill, near Meanwood, which, in 1788, he built a few miles out of Leeds, and in 1792, he began to work it. There he spent all his energies and all his money in various experiments, doing all he could towards improving the Darlington spinning machine, as he sought towards making something of the other instruments necessary to the production of linen. That he did considerable business is proved by the fact that his debt to Kendrew and Porthouse, to whom he had agreed to pay a royalty for each spindle that he employed, rose in a few years to £2000. He made no profits, however, during these first years, and declared himself unable to meet the claim. He also contended it on the ground that the machine was not yet perfected, and that his machinery so different from that of the Darlington inventors that he had really ceased to make use of their patent-right.

Of those improvements Matthew Murray was the chief author. Born at Newcastle in 1765, Murray had been working in an engine-mill at Stockton-on-Tees, when in 1789 he determined to go and try his fortune in Leeds. He offered his services to John Marshall, and was successful in the first job on which he was employed, that he was permanently engaged by him. By the end of 1789, before he had been a year at his new work, he had made so many valuable suggestions that his master made him a present of £20, and he was promoted to the management of the little workshop at Scotland Mill. He continued for six years in Marshall's establishment, by his ready wit and steady perseverance helping his employer through all his mechanical difficulties, and enabling him, in time to become the most successful flax-spinner in the world. In 1795 he left John Marshall to enter into partnership with James Fenon and David Wood, older and richer men than himself, in establishing engine-building and machinery-making shops at Holbeck, then a village, now a part of Leeds. Making all sorts of other tools, he continued to give special attention to the tools required in linen manufacture. But for his improvements," says his son-in-law, "it is nearly certain that flax-spinning in the neighborhood of Leeds would have ceased to exist, as all those embarked in it had lost the greater part of their capital without any success. At his commencement mill-gearing was in a very rude state, and in nearly its present condition." In or near the year 1795, John Marshall also went to Holbeck, there in Water Lane to set up the much larger mill which he later entered into partnership with the rest of the linen manufacturers, conducted by his successors.

[Conclusion on the Seventh Page.]

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DRY GOODS. MILLIKEN'S LINEN STORE. 828 ARCH STREET.

DRY GOODS. FARRIS & WARNER. No. 229 North NINTH Street, ABOVE RACE.

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